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Jed Mercurio: Nothing surprises me

The *Line Of Duty* and *Bodyguard* creator tells Manori Ravindran about his relationship with the SVODs and whether a Ryan Murphy-style talent mega-deal could be on the cards

At March's INTV conference, Netflix's VP of original series Cindy Holland was confronted with a slide of the global SVOD's programmes, on which the Richard Madden-fronted BBC One blockbuster *Bodyguard* was billed, prominently, as a Netflix Original between such dramas as *The Crown* and *Orange Is The New Black*.

The drama, in which Madden's stone-faced protection officer David Budd is charged with the care of home secretary Julia Montague, smashed records for the corporation, consolidating an audience of 15.9m across 28 days – the BBC's most-watched drama episode since records began in 2002.

Bodyguard (above) and *Line Of Duty* (right) are both created by Mercurio

If you ask creator and writer Jed Mercurio about his drama's attribution on the SVOD platform, he hesitates momentarily before coolly responding, "I don't think that's an accurate description."

"I think everyone knows the show is made for the BBC in the UK, and obviously the show is, in the rest of the world, experienced through Netflix. I think that's all that is."

But what about international audiences who might not know of the BBC's involvement in the show, in terms of editorial guidance? A savvy audience member, reckons Mercurio, knows how to Google.

"If people want to research a show, they can find out that in the UK, it was originally commissioned by

the BBC. I don't think anyone has sought to alter the fact that the BBC pre-dated Netflix's involvement."

Indeed, many were surprised when Netflix revealed a week ahead of the drama's finale in mid-September that it had picked up global rights from ITV Studios Global Entertainment, having boarded the project at an early script stage, leading many to remark at Netflix's very ability to spot a hit a mile away.

Questioned about the exact point Netflix boarded the project – for example, were all the scripts in the bag when they joined up? – Mercurio indicates that "script stage" is something of a spectrum for him.

"I never finish the scripts so there are always things that need to be scripted as we're going forwards," he shrugs.

"There are shooting scripts, but then we do more drafts when shooting. Because I'm showrunning, if I'm seeing things that need to change or be developed, then the first thing to do is go back into the script and do amendments.

"There were still script changes all the way until the end of the shoot," he adds.

But he allows that he and ITV Studios-backed prodco World Productions had a "really great relationship with the broadcasters", meaning both the BBC and Netflix.

"There wasn't a huge amount of traditional note-giving. It was much more that they were just very supportive of what we were doing."

Mercurio appears to be, as they say, platform-agnostic. However, his name comes up relatively quickly in discussions around British creative talent that SVODs might target for their notorious "golden handcuff" talent pacts, akin to the mega-deals they have struck out of the US already with the likes of super-producer Ryan Murphy and *Grey's Anatomy* creator Shonda Rhimes.

"I don't have any specific loyalties to any networks. In my position, it's much more important to nurture the right relationships with specific execs"

Jed Mercurio



It would not be altogether surprising for Mercurio – who is also behind that other UK drama behemoth *Line Of Duty* – to be snapped up, considering Amazon's exclusive two-year deal with *Catastrophe* co-writer Sharon Horgan and her prodco Merman. Could he be tempted?

"It would depend on what the deal was and what creative position it would mean," he says pragmatically.

But would he be open to it? "I would be open to something that was creatively exciting," he allows.

"I don't have any specific loyalties to any specific networks. In my position, it's much more important to nurture the right relationships with specific execs."

Unlike some writers, Mercurio appears to keep the business machinations around his work – and those of the drama market, in general – at arm's length.

Asked whether ITV and the BBC's decision to roll out SVOD service BritBox, which has slowly been gaining US subscribers, came as anything of a surprise, Mercurio says plainly, "Nothing surprises me."

"It's an established fact that broadcasters in the UK have a [VOD] component to their relationship with viewers through BBC iPlayer and the ITV Hub, and it will be interesting to see what effect on viewership this new venture has," he adds.

"The intention is obviously to have more content available and that would potentially drive more subscribers, but let's see what happens in the market."

Mercurio – who writes both *Line Of Duty* and *Bodyguard* alone, in addition to showrunning duties – is more focused on the work at hand. The Kew Media Distribution-sold drama, *Line Of Duty* returned to BBC One for a fifth outing on 31 March, and a sixth series has been long confirmed.

"We're looking forward to a conversation with the BBC once series five has aired about how it's performed and whether it feels like there is an appetite from fans to have more, or whether there's a feeling that the show is coming towards its natural arc.

"That conversation will be very specific, which is whether series six will be the last, or whether the BBC would be prepared to commission a seventh series so we can approach series six knowing it's not the last."

As for other projects on the horizon, there are "a few things I'm talking about with US companies" but nothing definite, he says. There are no plans, as well, to diversify in terms of genre. Mercurio won't be penning a youth-targeted comedy drama à la *Sex Education* for a streaming giant anytime soon.

"I really enjoy writing thrillers, and that's what I would concentrate on going forwards – certainly in the near future," he smirks. **TBI**





One-to-One: Two Worlds Collide

For TBI's first edition of 'One-to-One', a regular feature in which two high-profile execs interview one another to discuss the hot topics in TV today, *Les Misérables* producer Chris Carey talks to Sky Vision MD Jane Millichip about co-production, SVODs and dream projects

The two British entertainment powerhouses have worked on some of the most high-profile scripted TV projects in recent years, giving them much to talk about when it comes to market trends. Meeting for the first time at TBI's studio in London, however, talk first turned to their illustrious careers and how they built them.

Carey is executive producer at Lookout Point and a TV veteran whose recent producing credits include BBC One's *Apple Tree Yard* and *Les Misérables* – the event series which drew 4.5m viewers on its opening night. He started his career in the factual business, eventually going on to build his drama shingle Welded Tandem Picture, through which he produced Sky hit

This Is Jinsy. In the last few years, the exec says he has been focusing on “making increasingly bigger, high-end dramas”.

Meanwhile, Millichip is the driving force behind Sky's international production and distribution arm, which has handled supersized scripted titles such as *Britannia*, *Riviera* and *Blood*. She is set to receive MIPTV 2019's *Médailles d'Honneur*, an award saved for senior executives, who through their leadership, have made a significant contribution to the international TV community.

Here's a closer look at what the duo discussed, including market changes, meaningful projects and getting eyes on screens.

Millichip (left) and Carey (right) at TBI's studio in Soho, London

A marriage between commercial and creativity

For projects to come to life, commercial and creative objectives are increasingly tied closer together, according to the execs.

CC: What I've witnessed in the past five years in particular, but in acceleration, is the converging between creative and commercial, which seems to be extremely important going forward.

JM: Yes it is. The experience at Sky has been interesting because before Sky Vision was created six years ago, it didn't have a distribution arm. Now we work hand-in-glove with the commissioning team, and it's so much better for it.

We work really closely with Cameron [Roach, Sky's head of drama] and his team and he really wants to know what we need to sell a show.

Now, I know our place in the mix because if a show's been commissioned for Sky Atlantic or Sky One, it needs to look and feel a certain way and that's not for me to dictate, but there are allowances you can make even when you're commissioning for a very specific channel for the onwards international exploitation of that show.

We've learnt to co-produce better

As commercial and creative teams continue to merge, the execs agree that co-production has evolved into a better, more cohesive model.

JM: We're not making Euro-puddings anymore, where the shopkeeper is Italian and the teacher is Brazilian and the third man from the left is Polish, just to get a Polish subsidy.

A good co-production doesn't dilute the editorial, it enhances it.

CC: We're all much more focused on global content now, but I feel quite strongly that we need to temper that and put British culture and stories at the heart of projects.

We don't need a Finnish person where they don't have to be. The French can make *Call My Agent* and it sells everywhere.

JM: Years ago we had a comical view of co-production, which was 'my show, your money'. I remember working with channel teams and commissioning teams, which was really difficult because there was intransigence that the editorial remained in the UK but it needed someone else's money.

The trick is to know what the roles are before you start, rather than working before you go. So, if you're going to have rows, have them beforehand.

Margins are sacrosanct

The execs discuss how streaming platforms, which are increasing in number with the entry of Disney, AT&T and Apple, are changing the distribution and rights models.

JM: With SVODs, they've dramatically changed our view of rights because, generally, it's one deal and [the show's] out in the world. So, at Sky Vision, even though we're a rights management business, I've encouraged producers we work with to look for a mixed economy, so some work-for-hire and some retained.

CC: Because how can you build value in a company when you're just doing-

JM: Work-for-hire? You just have to make sure you have proper margins

CC: Absolutely

JM: Because the margins become absolutely sacrosanct in that situation

CC: Absolutely, because people always talk about high premiums, but they're not always high, are they?

JM: No, no, and I've seen some Netflix deals that are really difficult for the producer because they've got neither the rights nor the margin. Sometimes, they've got a deficit with unsalable rights where Netflix encourages a so-called co-pro deal, but actually the rights that Netflix gives you to trade don't hold value.

There is a finite budget for broadcasters

Streaming platforms have inflated the price of drama, and the execs believe it's having an impact on broadcasters.

JM: SVODS have brought us great ambition and fabulous shows, but when you're funded differently it

"I've seen some Netflix deals that are really difficult for the producer because they've got neither the rights nor the margin"

Jane Millichip



“I’m not pretending we’re saving the world, but my least favourite phrase is ‘it’s only telly,’ because it’s only said when it’s meant to make you feel better when things are tough”

Chris Carey



creates a great challenge for traditional telly.

CC: Yes. One of the challenges commercially is how you keep a pace of what shows actually cost to make when you’re planning things. I remember doing deals for *Les Mis* – when we did the numbers they looked appalling at the time.”

JM: When you’re funded differently, it creates a real challenge for traditional telly. There is a ceiling of spend on finite budgets for broadcasters. Whereas if you look at the participants in the marketplace that don’t derive their income from entertainment like Amazon and Apple – they’re a delivery company and hardware company using entertainment to promote other business.

Netflix is in our camp as an entertainment business, but they’re still in growth phase and there’s still a lot of debt in that business. It’s still not making money. It’s spending more than it receives in subscriber revenue, so that inflation budget can be quite harmful to the linear world, which can’t possibly work on a deficit strategy.

CC: But that’s part of their strategy.

JM: Yes, but there will be a point where they have to start making some money, presumably, or sell it to someone who doesn’t care enough.

CC: I was quite proud of what we managed to do with *Les Mis* – it’s a BBC show. It’s fantastic, whether it’s the BBC or you guys, that businesses are taking a risk, and long may it continue.

We just decided with *Les Mis* that in 18 months [the numbers] won’t look bad at all, and it will look like a good deal.

Event series are important for linear

Both execs have projects that have been or will be major TV events, which they think is important for the future of broadcast TV.

JM: I’m really pleased that there’s a bit of a revival of event series like *Les Mis* – it’s really important for the terrestrial world. If the linear world still has an advantage over SVOD, it’s being in the moment.

CC: It’s amazing how much appetite there is for the communal experience. We all loved talking about *Bodyguard* or *Doctor Foster* the next day.

JM: You can time-shift it, but people want to talk about it and if it’s only on for a couple of weeks, you tend to watch it.

CC: Yeah. It’s led to a convergence of film stars heading to TV as well, but they’re not going to commit to a seven-year option. They’re going to say, ‘Yes, I’ll do that specific piece,’

JM: We’ve got *Catherine The Great* coming out this year, which is a four-parter from New Pictures and



Original Pictures for Sky Atlantic and HBO – and it’s like, ‘How do we get to work with Helen Mirren?’. Well get a great script, a great character and make it limited. She’s not going to commit to *The Walking Dead* anytime soon.

Shows need to nourish culture

Among future dream projects, Carey says he would like to make something that impresses his children, while Millichip is keen on more innovative titles such Sky’s *I Am* – a Me & You production that features improvised scenes. Both execs agree, however, that TV has to be meaningful.

CC: There was a time in my factual career when every title had the world ‘celebrity’ in it, and I didn’t think it was particularly nourishing for culture. I only really want to do things that have some benefit.

JM: If we look at the statistics on how much time a day the average human is watching TV content, you think, ‘It better be bloody good.’

CC: I’m not pretending we’re saving the world, but my least favourite phrase is ‘it’s only telly’, because it’s only said when it’s meant to make you feel better when things are tough.

One of the things I loved about *Les Misérables* is that it’s got something to say. It’s got something to say about life and what it means to be human. **TBI**

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The big business of dubbing

Quality dubbing will be the key to the continued growth of international drama consumption, and SVODs and networks alike are doubling up in investment in the business to get ahead of the curve. Kaltrina Bylykbashi reports

In the past two years, the dubbing business has exploded, outpacing subtitling for the first time as a result of the growing global investment in localised content.

Some of the biggest studios in the business are seeing an astronomical rise in revenue as consumers increasingly look to titles such as Netflix's *Dark*, *The Rain* and *La Casa De Papel* (*Money Heist*) for entertainment.

Leading localisation platform Zoo Digital, which is attempting to transform the industry with a cloud-based solution, saw revenues jump by 73% to \$28.6m in July 2018 compared to the year prior – only stalling later in the year to staff up to meet client demand. Zoo pointed to a shift in requests for dubbing over subtitling for the revenue jump.

Elsewhere, global localisation studio BTI Studios told TBI that dubbing made up a mere 3% of its revenue in 2010 and has since jumped to 61%, with subtitling making less than 40% in revenue.

These are two of the many studios TBI has spoken to that have reported big business in dubbing as a result of the recent boom in international drama.

Needless to say, international titles are going through a growth period. Netflix, which spent \$12bn on content in 2018, is pledging to increase investment in European content by a third in 2019 alone.

This March, during a rare Q&A session with press, the streamer noted that the growth in localised content and dubbing would be key to taking on upcoming competitors such as Apple and Disney.

Currently, Netflix plans to roll out dubbed versions of its content in 27 languages. “We’re taking this new initiative very seriously,” said Debra Chinn, Netflix’s international dubbing director.

Quality counts

Netflix chief product officer Greg Peters puts the increased viewership of international titles down to better dubbing entirely.

Nearly 90% of new primetime shows originating in the EU over the past three years have been released in two or fewer European countries, he says. But

with seven European dub languages and 15 subtitle languages available in Netflix’s toolkit, it “explodes the potential viewership of European shows across the whole continent.”

Europeans have had a long-standing tradition of dubbing, making consumers more open to it. However, Peters says the real prize will be reaching US audiences, where dubbing is being accepted into the mainstream for the first time.

“Unfortunately there was a big hurdle there. When we surveyed people in the US versus those in Europe, a very high percentage of US viewers said they would never watch a film or TV series that was not in their native language.

“We had an instinct that the reality could be different if we did it well. And we found that when we presented US subscribers with international titles with both subtitles and great dubbing, we saw much higher viewing than was indicated in the survey.

“And most US members watched in dubs and were more likely to finish international shows when they are dubbed in English,” he says.

Quality, therefore, is going to be key to making Netflix’s international strategy successful.

At this year’s Berlin International Film Festival, Kelly Luegenbiehl, VP of international originals in Europe, said: “We’re trying to get better with the dubbing process and it’s something our team is working really hard on. Each time they iterate a new title, they try and figure out things they could do to improve it.”

Netflix’s Post Partner Program (NP3), which certifies post-production partners that want to work with the company, highlights the company’s investment in this business, growing from 19 to 80 partners since 2017.

One NP3 partner told TBI that to qualify in the program it had to adhere to specific technical criteria in terms of security, quality and operations.

“Many other publishers have such a list as well, but it’s not out there in the public sphere,” they said.

No room for mistakes

Localised programming today is often premium drama by default, meaning that dubbing has had to become



BTI Studios' revenue growth

more elevated, faster and far-reaching.

In addition, the localisation process still divides opinion among consumers, many finding poor dubbing both frustrating and distracting.

“There’s no room for mistakes today, because clients don’t have time for mistakes,” says My Kitchen EVP Deeny Kaplan. “They’re very rigid; they’re strict. You have multiple levels of quality checks, for everything going from sound checks to music and mixing. All of it is scrutinised.”

The key to a successful dub lies in using native speakers, correct casting and proper adaptation, according to Kaplan. She says the dubbing of French drama *Call My Agent* is one example of a successful localisation process.

“It’s great and you really get it because it’s done right. And when a title’s done right they gain an international audience,” she says.

Deeper local ties also elevate the standard of dubbing, which is why players such as Netflix have been accelerating their ties with international studios.

Nexus TV – an NP3 partner – says that in Italy, for example, there has been a long-established culture of dubbing.

“Dubbing is an extremely well-established market in Italy because we’ve been dubbing since the 1930s,” says Mattia Fioravanti, a spokesperson for Nexus TV. “There was a decision made during the fascist era not to subtitle anything that passed through Italy. I would say that 99% of movies and TV shows in Italy are

19

partners in 2017

80

partners in 2019

Growth in Netflix's Post
Partner Program (NP3)

Below: Netflix German
drama *Dark*



60%
from dubbing
40%
from subtitling

BTI Studios' revenue sources



now dubbed.”

“A very skilled school of dubbing talent and actors has grown up in the territory during this time, so for us, the general public would never complain about the authenticity of dubbing or how movies and TV shows can lose value via the localisation process.”

A shifting business model

The quest for quality has changed the shape of the industry over the past few years entirely, according to Kaplan, whose key clients include NBC.

Both networks and SVODs are looking to centralise dubbing work, according to the exec, which means that one company is now expected to have multiple sites globally. My Kitchen currently has 12 sites in 12 languages.

La Casa De Papel (below)
and *The Rain* (top)



“The beauty is that we create a template with time codes and character themes and narrative information, so that when it does need to be adapted into another language, we have those assets that allow us to easily create a consistency,” says Kaplan.

NP3 partner BTI also attributes its recent revenue success to owning and operating international studios.

“If you think about dubbing, it’s really hard to do without native language speakers, and if you’re listening to dub in your language and it’s not done well, it loses its creative impact,” says Chris Carey, BTI’s Americas MD.

“For us, the creative quality is the most important thing and the way to do that is to have a studio in every country. Not just the physical studio, but also a network of actors, editors and creative directors who know how to record the language voices, edit them, get them properly in sync and mixed, so that the dubbed language comes off as believable and natural.”

The strategy has paid off. Since 2008, BTI has acquired 10 studios, nearly tripling its revenue from €42m (\$48m) to €105m (\$119m). It has grown from owning three offices at launch in 1995 to 25 in 2019, and will continue to look for new areas of expansion.

Zoo, another NP3 partner, has taken this principle one step further by launching a cloud-based dubbing platform in 2018. Project managers, translators and freelancers of all kinds can now collaborate on the platform, at any time, without the need for a bricks-and-mortar studio, which further breaks down barriers to tapping into talent all around the world.

Zoo has also begun to offer the platform to traditional dubbing studios, meaning that the efficiency and turnaround of dubbing projects could be vastly improved over the next few months. **TBI**



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Elevating Omens



The creative team behind BBC Studios and Amazon Studios' *Good Omens* tells Manori Ravindran how they adapted the unadaptable, bringing Terry Pratchett's final wish to life

Ten years ago, it would have been inconceivable to adapt Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's 1990 fantasy novel *Good Omens* for the screen.

Written "as a bit of fun" between the two friends who "weren't famous at the time", the book finds angel Aziraphale and demon Crowley trying to prevent the End Times. An adaptation of the book – which has always been notoriously challenging to actualise with countless TV writers turning down the job over the years – was Pratchett's last request before his death in 2015.

Honouring his wishes, Gaiman – whose oeuvre includes the likes of *American Gods* and *Coraline* – began work on the script a week after the funeral, embarking on a two-year process that "trumped everything else".

Although a price-tag for the big-budget adaptation has yet to emerge, the David Tennant and Michael

Sheen-fronted *Good Omens* – the first co-production between BBC Studios and Amazon Studios – is a technicolor feast for the eyes, elevated by state-of-the-art tech that creates an immersive and otherworldly experience for audiences.

"Years ago, you wouldn't have seen TV platforms willing to take a risk like that, putting this much money in," explains BBC Studios' comedy head Chris Sussman.

"It would have been a film, but this is a hard story to do as a film. And there wouldn't have been the technology to do it. It's a timely course of events to have made it now."

While much has been said about the release strategy for the show, which sees Amazon debut the six-part series on 31 May with BBC Two following at least six months later, Sussman says the producer couldn't have asked for a better creative partner.

"There are some new paths to forge, but Amazon

have been an incredible partner. They're very good at backing creatives and they let you make the show you want," he tells TBI.

"The fact that Neil has been involved so heavily in everything, showrunning right from the start, has given them huge faith in this."

Amazon's backing has also enabled the show to be one of the most premium efforts to come out of scripted at the BBC in the last decade. Executive producer Rob Wilkins reckons the production's special effects have even surpassed films such as Peter Jackson's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, which is also being adapted for TV by Amazon.

"If you look at *Lord Of The Rings* on the big screen now, you can see where certain things are stitched together. You won't see that with *Good Omens*," he says of the trilogy.

"We're now at that point with CGI where it is entirely believable. It's the first time in history where TV budgets are at that level."

Indeed, what is evident across the footage, seen by TBI, is that CGI and storytelling is integrated in a fresh new way.

"In TV, it used to be a few years ago that the CGI shot would be the spaceship and then you cut inside to the hard set," says director Douglas Mackinnon. "Whereas now, we have a [CGI] spaceship that lands in a field and flies off again. It's just part of the story."



Wilkins adds: "It doesn't take over the story or jar you – you don't step out of the narrative, even for 10 seconds, as the CGI is played to you. It's completely immersive and it's so much more beautiful and precise."

"The book is the glue"

The creative team is upfront about the fact that, although the show is indisputably loyal to Gaiman and Pratchett's source material, liberties have been taken to elevate the narrative.

"We've taken departures because [the TV show is] a different thing," explains Mackinnon, highlighting Jon Hamm's archangel Gabriel character.

"That character isn't in the book but we needed him to be around for storytelling reasons. Very often an adaptation suffers because a book is written with the voice of the reader in mind, whereas we have to expand that onto the screen."

Elsewhere, while Shakespeare is mentioned once in the novel, the English writer gets an entire sequence shot out of London's Globe Theatre in the show.

In addition, Gaiman has written a half-hour explanation of Crowley's backstory at the beginning of the third episode that is completely original. "But the fans of the book will see that as a treat rather than a bad diversion," assures Mackinnon. **TBI**



Mackinnon, Tennant, Sheen and Gaiman (left to right)

Gaiman's Midas touch

Lead stars Michael Sheen, who plays angel Aziraphale, and David Tennant, a demon named Crowley, tell TBI that with Neil Gaiman on board, the TV adaptation was able to be comfortably creative with scenes that enhanced the source material.

"There's a fairly major section at the beginning of episode three, which in a series of 10 or so scenes we see the development of the relationship between Aziraphale and Crowley from the Garden of Eden, all the way through the history of the world, up to the present day," says Sheen.

"It's a major addition from the book and it was the scene we enjoyed the most."

Tennant adds: "It's very much in the spirit of the book, but that's the good thing about having Neil involved. This world is so unique and it's such an unusual voice that if anyone else was to do it, it would somehow be normalised."

"Anyone else adapting this script would just naturally have made it more sensible, but because we've got Neil there it maintains all the exuberance of the originals, even in those new sections."

However, with Amazon on board and a global audience in mind, the stars admit that there were some taste tests administered.

"There's one joke in it that became a little temperature-taker," says Sheen.

"There's a bit where Jon Hamm's character makes a little joke about Jeffrey Archer's books, and we were like 'no one's going to get this outside of the UK', but when we were at Comic-Con in San Diego they showed that clip and there was a huge laugh."

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Script to Screen: Harassment

Globo's SVOD refresh has been spearheaded by *Harassment*, a mini-series inspired by a group of women who spoke out against sexual abuse committed by Brazilian fertility expert Roger Abdelmassih

Having received more than 60 accusations of sexual abuse by patients in 2009, Roger Abdelmassih was sentenced to 278 years in prison by the Criminal Court of São Paulo, resulting in a media storm.

"I realised something that merited far more coverage in the case than it got: that Abdelmassih's accusers were more than mere victims – they were also extremely active protagonists who were crucial to the outcome of the investigation," says *Harassment* writer Maria Camargo.

"These women's roles suggested that their story could and should be retold. Beyond its dramatic potential, it was, above all else, a symbolic and very powerful story."

The high-impact limited series is developed for Globoplay, Globo's streaming platform, which has been repositioned to host an increasing amount of

international productions that move away from the telenovela format.

"Taking into consideration the pertinence of the drama's theme, the direction and cast, we understood that this project was powerful enough to mark this moment for Globoplay," says Silvio de Abreu, head of drama and comedy at Globo.

Act 1 – The story: Breaking a cycle of violence

Camargo says the core focus of the show is to highlight the violence many women face every day, and how they can break the cycle by joining forces.

"Women are abused to this very day. Male chauvinism endures, but now we're also seeing a very powerful reaction in opposition to that. The plot of *Harassment* reflects this changing world," she says.

Globoplay's *Harassment*



“When I first started outlining the series, there was already a very fascinating movement picking up steam, particularly on the internet. #MeToo hadn’t erupted yet, and when it did that only confirmed to us the topic had broken through, and it was extremely timely.”

Camargo’s drama idea emerged from the book *The Clinic: The Farce and Crimes of Roger Abdelmassih*, by Brazilian journalist Vicente Vilardaga, which focused on the symbolic significance of his crimes and conviction over the man himself.

“We live in a time of change, where female voices, in very broad terms, are gaining ground. It’s just the beginning, but we are definitely seeing a change,” she says.

“This story only takes place because the protagonists are women, with desires, vulnerabilities and, above all else, an essentially feminine strength.”

The series was filmed in São Paulo’s urban locations, where the original story unfolded.

“Aside from the degree of realism imparted by shooting in actual locations, this approach allowed us to explore, in a visually richer and more interesting way, the paradox between the metropolis and the victims’ loneliness; between the vastness of the city and the women’s confinement inside an anguish that’s almost always silent by nature,” says Camargo. “We wanted truth on the screen, and I believe we managed to achieve that.”

Act 2 – The objective: A shift from the telenovela

Harassment arrives at Globo as it looks to vary its portfolio to meet audience demand.

Over the past two years, Globo Studios, the broadcaster’s production arm, has been increasing the volume of drama it carries and varying its genres.

“Telenovelas have a great connection with Brazilian culture, and we export ours to more than 175 countries,” says De Abreu. “In the past few years, series have become more popular all over the world, so without leaving telenovela production aside, we have invested simultaneously in short formats.”

In particular, De Abreu says Globo has been looking for “human” and “emotional” dramas focused on personal conflicts, such as *Harassment*.

To do so it has launched Writer’s Home, a hub where a continuous pipeline of content is developed. In 2018, Globo developed 70 projects now ready for production. Around 75% of its titles are scripted.

At NATPE, Globo told TBI that it currently has 500 actors, 180 directors and 250 writers working there on a permanent basis.

Harassment is one of the many new shows Globo is investing in with a focus on personal conflict



“We make huge investments in talent, innovation and creativity, and we do believe in the power of this industry to contribute to transforming our society,” says De Abreu. “Audiences seek emotion, regardless of the language or country.”

Act 3 – The reach: International potential

In an attempt to grow the series’ international scope, Globo hired well-known Brazilian actors including International Emmy Award nominee Adriana Esteves (*Above Justice*) and International Emmy Award-winning star Antonio Calloni (*The Illusionist*) who plays Roger Sadala, a fictional doctor based on Abdelmassih.

Others include Jéssica Ellen (*Justiça*), Paolla Oliveria (*Assedio*), Elisa Volpato (*Mulher De Fases*) and Mariana Lima (*Assedio*).

In February, *Harassment* was selected for the Drama Series Days Market Screenings at this year’s Berlin International Film Festival. It was the only Brazilian title at the event and joined productions from Sweden, Spain, Israel and Argentina.

The show has since been licensed to Chile’s Mega Group and will premiere on Globo’s free-to-air channel in Brazil later this year.

“It touches on universal themes; campaigns against sexual harassment, these women’s strength and the main character’s sexism are all pertinent topics in all cultures. I believe that a good story has no limits and it engages audiences on all platforms,” says De Abreu.

Harassment was developed over the space of two years by Camargo, De Abreu, Monica Albuquerque and Edna Palatnik, after the project was greenlit in 2016. Amora Mautner is directing. **TBI**



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Bella Germania: A “new game” for drama

The floodgates have opened for premium German drama after a comparatively slow start in the high-end TV market, and now producers and distributors are thinking about getting ahead of the competition. Kaltrina Bylykbashi reports

Premium German drama made for an international audience has seen a steady but sharp rise in the past two years, as the territory moves past its conservative broadcast and writing model.

While supersized titles such as Amazon’s *Deutschland 83* (2015), Netflix’s *Dark* (2017) and Sky’s *Babylon Berlin* (2017) have done much to propel the genre forward for the territory, they arrived relatively late when compared to European

counterparts in the UK and Spain.

“Germany is just at the beginning of the cycle of the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of television,” according to Joerg Winger, co-creator of German super-hit *Deutschland 83*. He says that until now German broadcasters have been conservative and focused on homegrown procedurals.

“There was no real need to be innovative,” adds Winger. “In the US, it was crucial to be innovative because they have fierce competition as leaders in the

market. Similarly, for small countries like Denmark and Israel it's important to be innovative to sell programming internationally. Germany is somewhere in the middle – the market was always successful enough.”

Oliver Berben, head of international series development at Constantin Television – the producer of German hits *Perfume* and *The Typist* – says that German broadcasters formally had strict financial structures. “Most of the television broadcasters wanted work-for-hire, which is essentially where they pay you, tell you what to do and then you do it.”

Now there's a much more creative process, Berben says. Writing teams have changed. Previously, writers worked primarily in solitary and often produced and directed works as well, but this new form of storytelling has meant that they have to work in collaboration with a team. “A lot of writers are coming out of schools that are very much used to working together in writers' rooms and not being focused only on their own work and vision of a story.”

Now, Winger says: “With the arrival of the streamers, there's more competition, there's more appetite for different genres and serialised storytelling and we're catching up.”

“I have another series called *Hackerville* that was commissioned by HBO Europe. That was the first time we got a commission that wasn't with an anchor broadcaster, so it's possible now. That's the new game.”

In 2019 alone, we have seen the premiere of Beta Film's *Bauhaus – A New Era*, Netflix's *How To Sell Drugs Online (Fast)*, German language original *M-A City Hunts a Murderer*, Bavaria Fiction's *Brecht* and Sky Germany's *8 Days*.

At this year's Berlin International Film Festival, *Brecht* secured presales with buyers across Scandinavia and Southern Europe, while *Bella Germania* sold to Italy's RAI and *Big Bones* was the winner of the Berlinale Copro Series competition.

That's without mentioning upcoming titles such as Constantin Television's eight-parter for Amazon *We Children Of Bahnhof Zoo*, billed to be one of the most expensive dramas to emerge from the territory.

A co-production boom

Germany has quickly caught up with its European counterparts due to its widely-respected creative industry both in front of and behind the camera. It particularly has a strong reputation for hosting state-of-the-art production facilities.

As a result, Tandem Productions partner Jonas Bauer says that its drama has always sold “moderately well” around the world. “But the kind of shows that

were sold 20 years ago didn't make it into the most competitive television markets, with the highest quality standards, mainly in the UK and the US,” he explains.

In the last few years, however, this level of quality has changed according to the exec, and it's mainly down to co-production.

Moritz von Kruedener, MD of German-speaking markets at Beta Film, explains: “It's easier than it was before to finance big-budget series in Germany. What we were all used to is fully-financed series from public channels, and today it's pretty much all kinds of models. Take *1983* or *Babylon Berlin*, they're both financed with different partners.”

“This is probably one of the main reasons why it's easier to get money into these things, and why they have more creative input into each series.

“With *Babylon Berlin* we had to combine Sky's interests with ARD's public television interest, which

Brecht (opposite),
Deutschland 86 (below)
and *Bauhaus – A New Era* (bottom) are recent premium offerings





Das Boot (top) and *Perfume* – two high-profile German dramas

was a big challenge, and then we had Beta Film as an important partner with our interest for the international market, and I think this is for the good of the show.”

The majority of titles listed in this piece would have been a result of co-production. Take *Bauhaus*, a co-production between ZDF/ARTE, Constantin Television and Nadcon Film; or *Freud*, a partnership between ORF and Netflix; or recent hit *Das Boot*, a Sky-Bavaria tie-up. The list goes on.

Creativity has boomed as a result, as writers in the territory take on new styles and genres.

Execs tell TBI that for years German drama tended to focus on reliable themes such as historical pieces or crime procedurals and has now opened up to a range of topics and styles.

Winger says that even though *Deutschland* is based on closely followed history, it was the combining of a spy genre with a coming-of-age story that really elevated the series.

“We’re not making things up in terms of history, we’re true to the historical backdrop of events, but of course we have elevated it in terms of genre and taken the perspective of a young innocent spy. Its mixed tonality has done well for us,” he says.

Meanwhile, Tim Halkin, MD of Tandem Productions, the prodco behind upcoming post-war thriller *Shadow Play*, co-produced by Bron Studios (*The Bridge*), says the city of Berlin, with its flourishing cultural scene, has been a huge draw for international audiences in recent times.

“There’s a big fascination with Berlin,” he says. “A lot of successful programmes that are based in Berlin have caught people’s attention worldwide.”

Across genres, the city remains a stalwart in many internationally successful titles, including the *Deutschland* series, *Babylon Berlin*, *Berlin Station*, *Dogs of Berlin*, as well as upcoming titles such as *Bauhaus* and *Bahnhof Zoo*.

With great demand comes great competition

Von Kruedener says that just a couple of years ago, if you looked at TV programmes on broadcast in the territory, it was always the same 50 people involved across directors, cast and writers. The new development has forced broadcasters to change.

What this means is that while big-budget German dramas have created demand from international audiences, many local broadcasters are looking to keep up with the pace as well.

This has upped the competition for German creators, producers and distributors. Winger says: “The competition is heating up, with more and more series produced. If you get a greenlight now, it’s hard to staff it.”

While writers are being trained differently in Germany today through schools and industry practice, it’s still a relatively new development, causing a talent drought.

“The challenge is keeping the quality up because there’s a limited pool of talent and an unlimited appetite for new series from incumbents and streamers,” continues Winger. “You can’t train all writers to write a certain kind of show that literally didn’t exist five years ago. It’s a question of craft and experience.”

Furthermore, while the co-production boom has led to more opportunities in the territory, the financial model has become much more complicated for some. As Berben points out, “For a company like Constantin, it’s good because it’s made for it. If there’s a smaller company, however, you have to deal with multiple partners, which can be hard.” **TBI**

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Scripted Hot Picks

TBI Scripted talks to the creators, producers and distributors behind the best global-facing drama ready to hit the Croisette at MIPTV and the Cannes Series festival

World on Fire

World On Fire is the Helen Hunt-starring WWII drama following the intertwining fates of ordinary people in Britain, Poland, France, Germany and the US.

“It’s one of the most epic and powerful dramas we’ve had in a while,” says Ruth Berry, MD at ITVS GE. Set amid the creeping horror of the outbreak of the war, the drama follows an ensemble cast of characters as they traverse the ever-shifting lines between loyalty, brutality, love and loss.

“It’s more of a humanitarian story, rather than one focused on battle and politics,” says Berry. “We start off the season with tanks rolling into Warsaw in Poland, and follow a Polish family, German family, British family and so on, and it really is about ordinary people and how it impacted their life.”

The story is told in multiple languages and led by an international cast including Zofia Wichlacz (*Romanoffs*), Tomasz Kot (*Gods*) and Bruno Alexander (*Eden*) as well as Academy Award-winning Hunt and Emmy and BAFTA winner Sean Bean.

“The first series’ storyline plays out across Poland, Germany, Paris and Manchester,

so you can imagine the lengths that the production team has gone to tell each storyline in a way that feels authentic,” Berry says.

“There were multiple international crews involved at the various locations around Europe and because of that, several broadcasters have been following the show’s journey very closely.”

Several international partners have already shown interest in the drama, according to Berry.

The 7 x 60-minute series is written by *Marvellous* scribe Peter Bowker and produced by ITV-owned Mammoth Screen for BBC One.

It is developed by Mammoth’s creative director Rebecca Keane and executive produced by Bowker, Damien Timmer and Helen Ziegler for Mammoth Screen and Lucy Richer for BBC. The series producer is Chris Clough.

“I’m excited to distribute a show that is important for the world and for younger generations, helping to shape the way they think and their understanding of history,” says Berry. **TBI**



World on Fire

Distributor: ITV Studios Global Entertainment (ITVS GE)

Producer: Mammoth Screen

Broadcaster: BBC One (UK)

Logline: A multi-territory drama telling the story of WWII through the lives of ordinary people

Top
Pick



Wisting

Norway's latest drama is a trans-Atlantic detective thriller starring Carrie-Anne Moss (*The Matrix*) and Sven Nordin (*Lilyhammer*) as they attempt to catch a serial killer from the US.

The 10 x 45-minute series follows homicide detective Wisting (Nordin) as he encounters one of the most challenging cases of his life. A wanted American serial killer is on the loose in Norway, as his daughter – an intrepid journalist – is chasing headlines, leading her straight to him.

Meanwhile, Moss's character, an FBI agent who has spent her career chasing the killer, is brought into the investigation, leading to a clash of cultures and personalities between the investigative duo.

"*Wisting* takes the best facets of Scandinavian television – brilliant characterisation, cinematic visuals, and gripping narratives – and blends it with the onscreen richness and premium talent of a US series," says Chris Stewart, commercial director for scripted at Banijay.

The series, which was adapted from the novels of Jørn Lier Horst, a former senior investigation officer, is intentionally ambitious. Stewart says it follows the footsteps of acclaimed series *Lilyhammer*, *Occupied*

and *Valkyrien*.

"It is shot on a cinematic scale which obviously brings with it a significant budget. Drama at this level is expensive and the budget of *Wisting* is comparable to that of any premium series produced in the UK and Europe," he says.

Wisting, a Cinenord and Good Company Films production, commissioned by MTG for Viaplay, TV3 and ARD, combines both English and Norwegian language, which Stewart hopes will give the series a certain level of accessibility.

"We hope this will be of particular impact in the US where premium players are opening their doors to more and more non-US produced content," he says.

Having discovered the series at this January's Goteborg TV Festival, Banijay will bring the title to the international market for this first time at MIPTV. **TBI**

Wisting

Distributor: Banijay Rights

Producer: Cinenord and Good Company Films

Broadcaster: MTG for Viaplay, TV3 (Sweden), ARD (Germany)

Logline: An ambitious Norwegian detective thriller starring Carrie-Anne Moss





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Baghdad Central

Baghdad Central is a six-part crime thriller for the UK's Channel 4, written by *The Last Kingdom* scribe Stephen Butchard and based on the novel by Elliot Colla.

The series takes a glance at Baghdad in 2003. Iraqi president Saddam Hussein has just fallen and Muhsin al-Khafaji, an Iraqi and former policeman, is battling to keep himself and his ailing daughter safe in a city occupied by US forces.

When Khafaji is arrested and tortured by US forces in a case of mistaken identity, he meets British ex-police officer Frank Citrone who offers him safety for his daughter in return for his skills as a police officer in the Green Zone – the main international presence in the city.

Baghdad Central

Distributor: Fremantle

Producer: Euston Films

Broadcaster: Channel 4 (UK)

Logline: A crime thriller looking at Baghdad through the eyes of an Iraqi cop after the fall of Saddam Hussein

“It’s a period of history we’re all familiar with, but seen through a surprising perspective,” says Kate Harwood, MD at Euston Films and executive producer of *Baghdad Central*.

“Drama is always good when it has a bit of hindsight and context. We’re still living with the consequences of the Iraq War, and we’re still very much in a post-9/11 world.”

The thriller will include an international cast of UK, US and Middle Eastern actors including Waleed Zuaiter, Clara Khoury, Leem Lubany and Corey Stoll.

It is produced by Euston Films, part of Fremantle, and executive producers include Butchard, Alice Troughton as well as Harwood. Jonathan Curling will produce.

“I came across the novel and immediately thought of Stephen, who I’d worked with previously on *House of Saddam*. I knew he had an interest in the period and he said, ‘you had me at Green Zone,’” says Harwood.

Baghdad Central was commissioned for Channel 4 by Beth Willis, head of drama, with commissioning editor Manpreet Dosanjh and commissioning executive Jonny Richards. **TBI**



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The Murders



The *Murders* is Muse Entertainment's latest procedural drama focusing on homicide detective Kate Jameson, played by *Gotham*'s Jessica Lucas, and detective Mike Huntley, as they navigate the case of a mysterious killer who uses music for destructive ends.

"The lead character, a young woman who needs to fight guilt and prove herself in a difficult environment, is a strong modern female figure," says Emmanuelle Guilbart, joint CEO and co-founder at APC.

"She is constantly debating her choices and trying to conciliate her desire to succeed with her ethics. It's these kinds of personal contradictions viewers often relate to."

Lucas is joined on set with high-profile cast members including *Riverdale*'s Lochlyn Munroe (Huntley), *Orphan Black*'s Dylan Bruce, *Jessica Jones*' Terry Chen, *Ghost Wars*' Luvia Petersen and *Arrow*'s Venus Terzo.

She will also serve as executive producer, alongside Jesse Prupas and Michael Prupas of Muse Entertainment, Shawn Williamson of Brightlight Pictures and Jamie Goehring of Lighthouse Pictures.

Damon Vignale (*Motive*) is creator, showrunner and

exec producer.

Muse Entertainment has produced the 8 x 60-minute crime drama in association with Citytv, a division of Canada's Rogers Media. The series premieres on Citytv this spring.

It turns out crime procedurals with a modern twist are just what broadcasters want. NBCUniversal International Networks has already pre-bought the rights to the series for a number of key European and African channels, proving that the genre remains evergreen in the international market.

"There's currently a lot of serialised edgy shows, but *The Murders* stands out as a straight solid procedural, starring a diverse cast that reflects today's society," says Guilbart. "We are excited to introduce the show to international buyers at MIPTV." **TBI**

The Murders

Distributor: APC Studios

Producer: Muse Entertainment

Broadcaster: NBCUniversal International Networks (Europe, Africa), Citytv (Canada)

Logline: A female-led procedural starring *Gotham*'s Jessica Lucas



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Muna



Armoza Formats' *Muna*, a drama about an Arab-Israeli photographer battling with her identity, is among a slate of programmes at MIPTV that mark a "key focus" on scripted for the Israeli producer-distributor, which will come to market with more scripted than non-scripted titles for the first time

Sharon Levi, head of sales at Armoza Formats, tells TBI that as international dramas continue to generate demand, the distributor, which has worked in the drama space for a number of years, will start placing a greater emphasis on its scripted offerings.

"This MIPTV, we are coming with a key focus on scripted, launching more scripted shows than non-scripted titles, which is a first for Armoza and one that we are very excited about," says Levi.

"Our sales division has also been more focused on working with clients who are looking for unique scripted content, either for adaptation or as a finished series, and we will be attending more markets that are dedicated to scripted, such as Series Mania and Content London."

While Armoza has tended to emphasise punchy formats such as *I Can Do That* and *Sex Tape* to the market, the distributor says it is now looking for scripted titles with "a unique voice".

At MIPTV, Armoza's leading drama *Muna* will be presented to international buyers for the first time, having already made its debut on Israel's Kan network.

The story was written by Palestinian-Israeli musician Mira Awad, who was inspired by her own controversial and challenging journey as Israel's representative at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2009.

Awad tells TBI that she felt pressure as a Palestinian to drop out of the contest as it took place during a three-week war between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza. "Each side wanted me to align myself with them," she said.

Awad's photographer character of Muna in the drama is similarly put in a position where she is forced to choose a side.

"Eventually, she chooses her own camp – a place of her own values without listening to anyone's opinion," says Awad.

"Usually people outside of Israel have a strong black-and-white view of the area, deciding strongly who is right and who is wrong. This story is about the Palestinian minority within the state of Israel, where the map is much more complex.

"I'm hoping people get a glimpse of life in Israel and a magnified view of Palestinians living in Israel, and I would love for these audiences to take a look at a story that has not been told yet."

The title is a key example of the types of authentic series Armoza is looking for, according to Levi, providing a glimpse of how people are affected in the backdrop of political and physical tension. **TBI**

Muna

Distributor: Armoza Formats

Producer: Armoza Formats

Broadcaster: Kan (Israel)

Logline: An Arab-Israeli photographer battles with her identity



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Writer's Room Sarah Scheller

Comedy is personal

“When we first spoke about our vision for the show, we were adamant that the comedy should always come from truth.”

I have been fortunate enough to write two series of *The Letdown*, a very personal, narrative comedy about modern-day parenting. I have co-written every episode with my work partner, Alison Bell, from early blue-skying, to methodically breaking down stories to physically writing the dialogue. We do it all together. We also work in a program called Writer's Duet, which allows us to literally finish each other's sentences. Which we do, often.

This shorthand we've developed over our four years of working together, has proved an efficient way to work while also allowing our scripts to have a singular voice. It's also why we've decided against bringing other writers into our room – tonal consistency is so important for comedy. Or maybe that decision is more about our tendency for micro-management. And I don't like to share.

In the early days, when we first spoke about our vision for the show, we were adamant that the comedy should always come from truth. This, we thought, would be how we could freshen up the usual parenthood tropes, and we knew we could write with authority and validity if the stories actually happened in real life.

We never wanted to shy away from the darker moments of new motherhood, such as the loss of identity many new mothers face, while always finding the comedy, like lying to a stranger about not breastfeeding, just so you can drink your double-shot coffee without shame or judgement, only, of course, to be caught out. This commitment to comedic truths meant that almost every storyline had to have happened to one of us, or at least to family or friends.

Nothing was sacred and early brainstorming sessions are often us fleshing out our favourite stories and moments from the past year of parenthood. You're on high alert as a writer, always

on the lookout for interesting characters and ideas, and it's surprising at how adept you become at mentally filing stories away. This is particularly valuable for me between series. I don't work well under pressure and like to write down ideas whenever I can. I have a document called 'Nuggets' that I add to regularly – like right now, watching one of my kids parade around naked, avoiding a bath. It's all gold.

As I have been LA-based for a number of years, we have been lucky enough to write out of Charlie's, a unique, creative hub that is part of Australians in Film, located within the historic Raleigh Studios in Hollywood. With the support of Creative NSW, which has funded our desks for both series, we've had our own nurturing space and, most importantly, our own coffee machine, which has really helped with the creative flow.

I'm not sure how typical our writing process is, but we've convinced ourselves it's okay to talk and laugh all day – it's a comedy after all. Our process feels free and uninhibited; we try not to hinder ourselves with structure and guidelines. Boring. Our aim is always to simply tell the story in the most interesting way.

Having said that, we really love detail and a theme. It's not uncommon for us to spend all day coming up with episode titles or searching for tenuous thematic links that realistically no audience member would ever comprehend.

Still, it keeps the process fresh and interesting, which is increasingly important when you're looking at 13-plus episodes of television. Writing subsequent series has been joyous, as I felt the second series was a lot smoother and easier than the first, and maybe the third could be easier still.

Still, key elements remain the same – laughter, tears, endless gossiping and bottomless cups of coffee and soup. **TBI**

Sarah Scheller is the co-creator of ABC Australia and Netflix's motherhood-focused comedy drama *The Letdown*

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